

ARTICLE APPROVED
ON PAGE 1LOS ANGELES TIMES
11 MARCH 1981

Reagan to Ease Curbs on CIA, Admiral Says

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WASHINGTON — A top CIA official predicted Tuesday that President Reagan will issue a directive enabling federal agents to engage in counterintelligence activities in this country with fewer legal restrictions.

Admiral Bobby R. Inman, CIA deputy director, said in making his prediction that he was not raising the specter of a U.S. intelligence agency spying on its citizens but rather

Although Inman declined to say what restrictions would be eased, it was learned that a draft directive being circulated among officials in the CIA, the Justice Department and the National Security Agency would reduce the powers of the attorney general to act as an executive branch watchdog over U.S. intelligence agencies.

Jerry Berman, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, took a dim view of the proposed changes. "If promulgated, they represent a significant and dangerous expansion of CIA authority to spy on innocent Americans and corporations in the United States," he said.

A government source, however, said: "The feeling within high levels of this Administration is that there

has been too much regulation (of the intelligence community).

Referring to executive orders issued by former President Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter, the source added: "The attorney general has become too involved with intelligence policy instead of restricting himself to matters of law. Everyone has the same goal here making it possible for the intelligence community to do its work."

He said Atty. Gen. William French Smith "is sympathetic with these aims."

Restraints on Searches

Another authority, Kenneth C. Bass, who resigned last month as head of the Justice Department's Office of Intelligence Policy and Review, said one idea being discussed is relaxation of legal restraints that now prohibit CIA agents from conducting secret searches, break-ins and physical surveillances within the United States.

However, Inman told reporters Tuesday that while such an idea may have been discussed, "I don't see that as a likely outcome" in a new presidential directive, which Inman predicted would be issued this summer. "It automatically raises worries in the body politic," he said.

The draft executive order departed from the Carter order's prohibition of electronic surveillance by the CIA in the United States. It provided, instead, that "the CIA may engage in electronic surveillance activity within the United States only for the purpose of assisting, and in coordination with, another agency within the intelligence community authorized to conduct such electronic surveillance."

Request for Information

Inman said a number of proposals have been circulated because the Reagan White House earlier this year asked the CIA and other intelligence agencies "what restrictions now exist by law, by executive order and by practice which you believe impact on your ability to be as effective as you ought to be."

Inman said the White House wants to assess "our capabilities of dealing with the problems of terrorism and counterintelligence" in the United States and abroad.

By law, the FBI is charged with investigating terrorist and subversive groups within this country. The CIA has the same job overseas in connection with its broad mandate to gather foreign intelligence.

The most recent presidential directive governing actions of the intelligence community was issued by Carter in January, 1978. Executive Order 12036 retained safeguards issued by Ford to protect the privacy of American citizens. But Carter added that each agency must develop procedures and practices to be approved by the attorney general.

President's Powers

Under the Carter order, only the President could authorize general use of so-called intrusive techniques, and the attorney general was to approve each use only after finding probable cause to believe that the target of the technique was an agent of a foreign power.

Under the proposed order, however, the President is removed from the process, with general authority delegated to the attorney general. The attorney general, in turn, could delegate authority for techniques such as electronic surveillance without a warrant to the head of intelligence agencies.

The requirement that there be probable cause to believe the target is an agent of a foreign power would be eliminated.

According to Chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), the Senate Intelligence Committee asked for and has received a copy of the proposed changes. CIA officials are scheduled to brief the committee on Friday.